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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 001409

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIAN MILITARY ACTIVITY IN SOMALIA

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C/NF) Summary. Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi told the Ambassador on June 15 that Ethiopia had no intention of invading Somalia, but admitted that there were a small number of Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) troops 15 kilometers inside Hiraan, Somalia to protect the flank of the Alhu Sunnah Wal Jammah (ASWJ) militias in Galguduud, and to signal to al-Shabaab and Hisb Islam that they should not come any closer. Meles also detailed Ethiopian support to ASWJ, other proxy groups, and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), intended to empower them to fight against the extremist insurgents. End Summary.

Meles: "There are a Few Troops in Somalia"

¶2. (C/NF) Meles admitted that there were a small number of ENDF troops positioned at Kalabeyr, a town located 15 kilometers inside Somalia on a key road junction controlling access to northern Galguduud, to prevent al-Shabaab and Hisb Islam militias from "outflanking" Ethiopian supported ASWJ militias in Galguduud. In addition, calling the deployment a "recon in strength," he said the ENDF in Kalabeyr were deliberately allowing the local population to see them in order to send a warning to al-Shabaab and Hisb Islam that they should not come any closer to the Ethiopian border. He said there were no ENDF troops "deep" inside Somalia, but recon missions near the border would continue as required. Meles noted that he would continue to insist on an extremist free "buffer zone" along the border to limit infiltration of anti-Ethiopian insurgents. Meles said there were Ethiopian intelligence officers moving in and out of Somalia, but he said they were not in uniform.

Ethiopian Support to ASWJ

¶3. (C/NF) In addition to protecting ASWJ's flank, Meles said Ethiopia was providing them with a small amount of ammunition, but not weapons. He said ASWJ did not need weapons, only bullets. He insisted that his government was not providing weapons to any group in Somalia because he could not be sure that the weapons would not eventually be used against Ethiopia, noting that weapons often changed hands or were sold inside Somalia.

Military Support to Omar Hashi

¶4. (C/NF) Meles volunteered that he was providing ammunition to TFG Minister of Security Omar Hashi to support

Hashi's planned offensive in Hiraan. He said Hashi was in the process of mobilizing militias in the region to fight al-Shabaab and Hisb Islam. Also in support of Hashi, Meles said Ethiopia was "rearming" several Ethiopian allied militias that withdrew from Somalia to Ferfer, Ethiopia when the ENDF pulled out of Somalia in February 2009. Those militias were "disarmed" by the ENDF when they withdrew, and Meles insisted that Ethiopia was giving them their previous weapons back rather than providing them with new weapons.

Support to Ethiopia's Somali Proxies

15. (C/NF) Meles said Ethiopia was also supporting Rahanweyn militias in Gedo, although he said they had not been given any ammunition yet. He planned to give them ammunition only for one engagement at a time, but he said they had not yet provided Ethiopia with a sufficient plan to warrant delivery of support. The same was true of Digil and Mirifle militias in southern Somalia. He was prepared to support them if they provided concrete plans, but he thought they were much less prepared than the Rahanweyn militias, and therefore it might be some time before he provided assistance to them.

Support to TFG in Mogadishu Possible

16. (C/NF) On the question of whether Meles had considered providing military support to the TFG in Mogadishu, Meles responded that the TFG leadership had requested that Ethiopia train TFG troops in Ethiopia, and provide weapons and

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ammunition. Meles said he was prepared to train TFG troops if the international community provided funding, but he said Ethiopia could not support the training with its own resources. He said he was prepared to provide some ammunition to the TFG, not weapons, but said the logistics of how to deliver the supplies was preventing the transfer. He said the TFG had requested that Ethiopia fly the material directly to Mogadishu, but Meles said he refused. He stated he would not allow any Ethiopian aircraft to fly military supplies to the city. He also noted that he was concerned about the public perception of Ethiopia flying ammunition to the TFG, but commented that the TFG must not be too worried about that perception or they would not have requested he deliver it to Mogadishu.

The U.S. Needs to Continue Assistance

17. (C/NF) When asked about U.S. assistance to the TFG, Meles said stability should be the priority. Therefore, money to pay salaries of TFG troops, support for TFG-ASWJ rapprochement, and military equipment was critical. Nevertheless, he cautioned against providing weapons because of the inability to keep track of what happens to them.

Comment

18. (C/NF) Meles' description of ENDF activity in Somalia is consistent with what we are hearing from our many ENDF contacts, and therefore, we believe his statements to be accurate. Ethiopia's small military incursions and support to proxies are intended to keep al-Shabaab and Hisb Islam from occupying positions on the Ethiopian border. We have seen no indication that Ethiopia is preparing any large-scale military operations into Somalia. On the contrary, the ENDF is still licking its wounds from the expensive and lengthy two-year intervention that ended in February. Meles did not discuss recent reports of ENDF troops in Balanbale, another town only 15 kilometers from the border in Galguduud, but we assess the purpose of this incursion to be similar to the one at Kalabeyr. Meles clearly believes that these actions are in the direct national security interest of Ethiopia, and we

anticipate that he will continue to resist suggestions that
he cease these activities. End Comment.
YAMAMOTO